

Caseworker Resources

Family Reunification, Concurrent Planning, and Permanency

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this document is to support Social Workers and Probations Officers (here after identified as caseworkers) by giving you access to resources and knowledge to complete mandated tasks with the goal of improved outcomes for children, youth and families. The following resources are intended to empower caseworkers by providing a brief history of laws and regulations that support your daily work, current mandates impacting caseworker practice, and guides for completing and documenting quality case worker visits. Take note of the hyperlinks throughout the document for additional information. There are also desk guides, templates, related All County Letters and other resources located at the end of this document.

DEFINITIONS

[Division 31](#)

Division 31 is the Manual of Policies and Procedures that defines the work caseworkers do every day. It is the collection of mandates set forth by law and legislation and is the guiding principal for social workers and probation officers working with children and families.

[Welfare and Institutions Code \(WIC\)](#)

WIC is the collection of general and permanent rules and regulations set forth by California rule makers and legislatures. WIC is the authority for the implementation of Division 31.

[All County Letters \(ACL\)](#)

ACLs are documents that are created by the California Department of Social Services that explain new mandates/laws and identifies the impact of those laws on caseworker interactions with children and families. ACLs breakdown requirements and procedures and counties are responsible for implementing and enforcing policy in their county.

[All County Informational Notices \(ACIN\)](#)

ACINs are documents that reiterate requirements. They do communicate best practice and/or processes. ACINs do not communicate new laws or new mandates.

Policy

A policy is an intentional system of principles, based on laws, and is used to guide decisions and achieve reasonable outcomes. A policy is a statement of intent and is implemented as a procedure or protocol that guides an action or behavior. Child Welfare Policy is the foundation for caseworkers that is intended to guide and enhance caseworker practice behaviors and improve outcomes.

Permanency Planning

Permanency Planning involves decisive, time-limited, goal-oriented activities to maintain children within their families of origin or place them with other permanent families.

Planning for permanency begins at the dispositional/detainment hearing and is an on-going process throughout the life of a case.

Concurrent Planning

Concurrent Planning is required by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and is an approach that seeks to eliminate delays in attaining permanent families for children and youth in foster care. This practice can shorten the time to achieve permanency if efforts toward the primary goal prove unsuccessful, because progress has already been made toward the secondary goal. This information can be found at the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#).

Permanency, Safety, Well-Being are the three cornerstones of caseworker interaction with all youth. Everything you do with your youth and their families should fall into one of these three categories. They are also the three goals of child services and are used to better measure the outcomes of children involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Permanency

It is the job of the caseworker to secure permanency for all youth. Permanency is not just a roof over their head, but stable people, networks, resources, and connections that will guide and empower our youth.

Safety

Physical, mental, emotional are the areas of safety that must be continually and diligently assessed. Providing safety means protecting kids from harm, meeting their needs, building a relationship with them, and advocating for permanent connections on their behalf.

Well-Being

According to the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#), the framework for well-being is set in four domains: (a) cognitive functioning, (b) physical health and development, (c) behavioral/emotional functioning, and (d) social functioning. It is the role of the caseworker to assess the needs, deficits, and strengths of the youth and families you work with. Well-being also includes education, appropriate development, and effective services and case management.

VISITS - CASEWORKER TIPS AND RESOURCES

Quality Caseworker Visits with Children/Youth

Welfare and Institution Code and Division 31 direct the work of caseworkers and specifies the purpose, requirements, and documentation of caseworker visits with youth, their parents, and caregivers. The purpose of caseworker contacts with the child/youth is to assess the safety and well-being of the child/youth and to achieve the following objectives:

- Monitor the child/youth's physical, emotional, social, and educational development
- Engage and involve the child/youth and the caregiver in the development of the case plan
- Gather information about the child/youth to identify necessary services to be included in the case plan and monitor the effectiveness of those services
- Ensure the child/youth can maintain a relationship with siblings, relatives and adults who are important to the child/youth
- Assist the child/youth in preserving and maintaining religious and ethnic identity

- Build rapport and maintain a helping relationship to provide continuity and stability
- Solicit the child/youth's input on their future and discuss current and future placement
- Discuss plans and progress with the child/youth
- Every youth has the right to a private conversation. Caseworkers must offer the youth the opportunity to have a private conversation at **every** visit. If the youth declines, the caseworker must make note of it in the case note (WIC sections 16516.5 and 16516.6).

Frequency of Visits + Quality Visits = Better Outcomes

Quality Caseworker Visits with Legal Parents/Guardians

Caseworkers are also responsible for seeing parents/guardians at minimum of once a month. Engaging with biological parents and developing a relationship with them is what moves a case towards family reunification or alternative plans for permanency for the child/youth. Engaging with birth parents can sometimes be challenging, keep these things in mind when working with parents:

- Pursue parents and engage them to participate in case planning and achievement of family goals
- Provide fair and consistent assessment and access to trauma informed services
- Be mindful of individual and family culture, religious, and social factors
- Educate parents of their rights, responsibilities, and obligations, as well as processes, protections, and consequences related to being involved with agency and juvenile justice services
- Engage parents in establishing planned, progressive, and purposeful visitation between the youth and appropriate family members
- The intention of maintaining and creating connections for the youth is important to their well-being.
- It is important to engage family throughout the life of a case, as often permanency can be found with other family members when parents are not appropriate for reunification.

Quality Caseworker Visits with Caregivers

Collaboration with caregivers is an essential part of the child's/youth's success in out of home placement. Caregivers offer critical information about your kids, including where the child is in his/her development, what the child's observed behavioral and mental health needs are, and the child's current education and health needs. Without engaging the caregiver, this information is hard to obtain from any other individual involved in the case. Frequent, proactive, and productive caseworker contact with caregivers and resource parents has been associated with increased placement stability and positive outcomes in the ability of the caregiver to meet the needs of a child/youth. Caseworkers need to cultivate a relationship with caregivers that allow for open, honest, and consistent conversation. Refer to the Resource section below for information on disclosing information to caregivers.

Case Planning According to Division 31

- A case plan is a written document that is developed based upon an assessment of the circumstances that required child welfare services intervention, in which the social worker identifies a case plan goal, the objectives to be achieved, the specific services to be provided, and case management activities to be performed.
- Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16501.1 specifies that case plans are due within 60 days of the initial removal of a child. Updates to case plans are required as the service needs of the child change, and the family's needs dictate, and shall be updated in conjunction with each status review hearing, no less than every six months.
- The child's case plan is the portion of the case plan that identifies a child's specific needs and services. This plan shall contain the information on the background and needs of the child that the placing social worker deems necessary for the effective care of the child. For the purpose of approval of a home, the child's case plan fills the requirements for the Needs and Services Plan, as identified in Foster Family Home Regulations, California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Division 6, Chapter 9.5, Article 3.
- Concurrent Services Track is the portion of the case plan, for a child receiving family reunification services, that identifies the child's permanency alternative and the services necessary to achieve permanency, should family reunification fail.

Case Plan Requirements

Welfare and Institution Code 16501.1 clearly mandates what is required to be in a case plan, the time frames for creating and updating a case plan, and what topics are to be covered in case plan updates. Refer to the Resource section below for information on case plan topics and case plan updates.

Case Documentation According to Division 31

Division 31 requires the documentation of **each** contact with the child, the child's family, and caregiver. Division 31 also outlines the areas of focus for caseworker visits. These topics should be intentionally discussed and documented throughout the life of the case. Refer to the Resource section below for information on the topics that must be discussed and documented for each visit with a youth, their parent, and caregiver.

Placement Requirements – Division 31, Section 400

Division 31, section 400, outlines the general requirements for placement as follows:

- The social worker, other representative of the placing agency or another agency providing services, or other adult with whom the child is familiar, shall be present at the time of placement, unless the child is placed out of state.
- At the time of initial placement in foster care of a child who is a dependent of the court, the agency responsible for placement and care shall provide information describing the review process, including the permanency planning hearing, and subsequent court and administrative reviews, to the parent(s)/guardian(s), and to the child, if ten years of age or older.
- The placement of children in the same home or facility when such children have different legal status shall be subject to the provisions of Welfare and Institutions Code Sections 206 and 16514.

- A foster parent providing out-of-home care to a child pursuant to court orders or providing such services to a voluntarily placed child shall have the legal consent authority specified in Health and Safety Code Section 1530.6.

Additional Resources for Placement

Assembly Bill 2247 and [ACL 19-26](#)

Effective January 1, 2019, all child welfare agencies are required to develop, implement, and document a placement preservation strategy in consultation with the Child and Family Team (CFT) for most dependent foster youth placement changes, but also provides exemptions to this new requirement. AB 2247 also prohibits any foster youth placement change to occur between the hours of 9 p.m. and 7 a.m. and requires the child welfare agency to serve written notice of the placement change, to the parties listed on page three of the above ACL 19-26, 14 days prior to the change of placement, unless certain conditions apply.

Sibling Placement and Visitation – WIC CODE 16002

Simply stated, caseworkers are responsible for placing siblings together. If siblings cannot be placed together, the caseworker is responsible for maintaining sibling connections and relationships. If siblings aren't placed together, the caseworker shall document the diligent efforts to place siblings together and reasons why they were not placed together, if applicable.

Dual Status Youth

Dual status youth refers to youth who are involved in both the juvenile probation system and the child welfare system. [ACIN I-05-06](#) is a result of the passing of [Assembly Bill 129](#). This bill authorizes the probation department and the child welfare services department in any county to create a protocol which would permit a minor who meets specified criteria to be designated as both a dependent child and a ward of the juvenile court. A minor who is designated as both a dependent child and a ward of the juvenile court would be known as a dual status child.

Concurrent Planning/Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)

Refer to the Permanency Options for Youth in Out of Home Care document linked below in the Resource section for information on Concurrent Planning and APPLA.

Incarcerated Parents

In regard to parents or legal guardians who are incarcerated, institutionalized, or court ordered to a residential substance abuse treatment program, it is important that the county social worker/probation officer document in the case plan all efforts made to contact and provide information to the parents or legal guardians, as well as, all efforts made to inform the parents or legal guardians of the need for them to maintain contact with their child. Any barriers to these parents or legal guardians fulfilling the requirements of the court ordered reunification plan must be documented in the case plan, as well.

It is also important that the county worker makes every effort to offer services to parents who are incarcerated, institutionalized, or court ordered to a residential substance abuse treatment program and to remove any barriers those parents face in receipt of those services, whenever possible. Existing law states that a dependent may not be referred for a permanency hearing if reasonable reunification services have not been provided or offered.

Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

The Indian Child Welfare [Act of 1978 \(ICWA\)](#), is federal law that governs the removal and out-of-home placement of American Indian children. [Assembly Bill 3176](#) governs the proceedings for determining the placement of an Indian child when that child is removed from the custody of his or her parent or guardian. Existing law specifies that the state is committed to protecting the essential tribal relations and best interest of an Indian child by promoting practices in accordance with ICWA. Existing law requires a court in all Indian child custody proceedings to, among other things, comply with ICWA. Under existing law, a determination by an Indian tribe that an unmarried person who is under 18 years of age, is either a member of an Indian tribe, or is eligible for membership in an Indian tribe and a biological child of a member of an Indian tribe, constitutes a significant political affiliation with the tribe and requires application of ICWA to the proceedings.

RESOURCE DOCUMENTS

- [References and Resources for Caseworkers](#)
- [History of Public Law 109](#)
- [Caseworker Visits and Federal Funding](#)
- [Information Disclosure](#)
- [Permanency Options for Youth in Out of Home Care](#)
- [Documentation According to Division 31](#)
- [Case Plan Requirements](#)
- Template for Caseworker Visits with Youth/NMD can be found in [ACL 19-87](#)

For questions regarding Concurrent Planning or related policy questions, please email the ConcurrentPlanningPolicyUnit@dss.ca.gov.